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JEWS UNDER THE REPUBLIC OF CRACOW (1815–1846)

Republic of Cracow (1815–1846), just one of a handful of European republics, also known as the Free City of Cracow, was a small city-state, with a surface area of just 1150 km², stretching along the left bank of Vistula, neighbouring from the west with the Kingdom of Prussia, from the north and east with the Kingdom of Poland, and from the south with the Austrian Empire.¹ In 1815 it had a population of 88,000, of which about 8% were Jews.² During the following three decades the Republic of Cracow witnessed a surge in the level of population. As a result, in the mid-1840s Cracow already had 148,000 inhabitants, with 12% declaring Jewish lineage.³

Jews settled throughout the Republic of Cracow, but it was Cracow which saw the majority of them. In 1815 Cracow, the capital and the only city in the Republic of Cracow⁴, had a population of 23,000. Of these 5,000 professed Judaism.⁵ In the 1820s the number of Cracovians exceeded 30,000, whilst the circle of Cracow Jews grew to 10,000.⁶ In the 1830s Cracow already had 40,000 inhabitants, of which 13,000 were Jews.⁷ Both of these indicators, the one referring to the overall number of Cracovians and the other demonstrating the number of Jews, remained virtually unchanged up until the fall of the Republic of Cracow.⁸

A comparison of these figures allows us to conclude that in the period 1815–1846 the Jewish community expanded by more than 170%. This was possible thanks to three

¹ Bieniarzówna 1948, 12; Wachholz 1957, 47; Bartel 1976, 8. See also Gierowski 1983, 149; Chwałba 2000, 252.

² Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (State Archive, Cracow), *Organizacja i ustrój państwa (1815–1817)*, WMK V-1, 1815. See also *Pomniki prawa Rzeczypospolitej Krakowskiej 1815–1818*, ed. by W. Tokarz, vol. 1: [Akta zasadnicze. Protokoły Komisji Organizacyjnej], Kraków 1932, 78–80.

³ Zdanie sprawy o stanie Wolnego Miasta za rok 1843, *Dziennik Praw Wolnego Miasta Krakowa i Jego Okręgu* 1844 (without number).

⁴ Apart from Cracow in territory of the Republic were 224 villages and 3 small towns: Chrzanów, Trzebinia, and Nowa Góra.

⁵ Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (State Archive, Cracow), *Organizacja i ustrój państwa (1815–1817)*, WMK V-1, 1815.

⁶ Zdanie sprawy o stanie Wolnego Miasta za rok 1821, *Dziennik Rozporządzeń Rządowych Wolnego, Niepodległego i ściśle Neutralnego Miasta Krakowa i Jego Okręgu* 1822 (no. 4552 Dz. Gł. Sen.); Zdanie sprawy o stanie Wolnego Miasta za rok 1827, *Dziennik Praw Rzeczypospolitej Krakowskiej* 1827 (no. 5415 Dz. Gł. Sen.).

⁷ Wachholz 1957, 47; Bieniarzówna/Malecki 1985, 52.

⁸ Zdanie sprawy o stanie Wolnego Miasta za rok 1843, *Dziennik Praw Wolnego Miasta Krakowa i Jego Okręgu* 1844 (without number).

factors overlapping one another. The first of these was the high birth rate amongst the local population. The second was due to the influx of Jewish emigrants from neighbouring states. The third involved internal migration, with people moving from areas outside the city to the capital which – with time – constituted more than 70% of all Jews in the Republic of Cracow.

As the Jewish community increased in Cracow so too the religious structure of the city underwent change. In the early years of the Republic of Cracow Jews constituted 20% of the overall number of inhabitants of Cracow, whilst from the mid-1820s to the fall of the Republic of Cracow their percentage oscillated around 31%.

Though their population was so large, Cracovians professing the Jewish faith occupied only a small part of the city. Contemporary Cracow contained eleven smaller administrative districts, known as *gminas*.⁹ The first five of these were located within the perimeter of the former city walls, whilst the remaining six constituted Cracow suburbs – Kleparz and Kazimierz.¹⁰ On Kazimierz, where *gminas* VI, X and XI were located, was the focus of Cracow Jews (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Kazimierz – Map of Cracow (by Teofil Zebrawski, 1836)

A number of factors were responsible for the above. The first of these was historical context. Kazimierz had been populated by Jews for a number of centuries. Secondly, the Jewish community was characterised by isolationism and the need to live together with fellow believers. The third factor concerned comfort. Kazimierz contained the entire infrastructure required by Judaism – synagogues, cemeteries, mikves, hospitals, schools, circumcision facilities etc. Fourthly, the concentration of Jewish settlers in

⁹ Wachholz 1957, 289–290.

¹⁰ Bieniarzówna/Malecki 1985, 45.

Kazimierz was the result of binding legislation. In keeping with the provisions of the *Statute Establishing the Israelites in the Free City of Cracow and its Environs*, a regulation issued by the Senate of the Free City of Cracow in 1817, whose purpose was the regulation of the legal status of Jewish inhabitants in general, the right to live outside Kazimierz was given only to those persons capable of demonstrating appropriate professional, scientific and material qualifications – professors and academic doctors, inventors and artists, as well as manufacturers, craftsmen and merchants who – for a minimum period of 6 years – had demonstrated impeccable management of their activities and were in possession of considerable assets, both cash and commodities, but only if they were capable of speaking and writing in Polish or German, wore non-Jewish attire and sent their children to state schools.¹¹ Not many people met these requirements – under the Republic of Cracow only 196 Jewish families obtained the right to live outside Kazimierz.¹²

Limitations on choice of residence meant that there were also limitations on the purchase of chattel and real estate in Cracow. Under binding provisions Cracow Jews could only purchase chattel and real estate in that part of the city in which they lived. However, the inhabitants of Kazimierz did not have the right to purchase or let any property located at Wiślana Street, the main thoroughfare of Kazimierz.¹³

Apart from the above restrictions there was also a further limitation – place of residence gave the possibility to apply for civic and political rights. It must be remembered that under the provisions of the *Statute Establishing the Israelites in the Free City of Cracow and its Environs* Jews were deprived of voting rights and of the possibility of holding public office. But there was one exception to this rule. The abovementioned rights were granted to “civilized” Jews. Only those who had the right to live outside Kazimierz were regarded as such. These were people who had lived outside Kazimierz for at least 6 years, who were regarded as an asset to society at large, and who had not fallen foul of the law.¹⁴ As we know, not many Jews lived outside Kazimierz, and this additional condition limited the number of potential candidates even more. As a result, throughout the existence of the Republic of Cracow, a mere 200 Cracovian Jews managed to meet these strict restrictions and were granted full civic and political rights.¹⁵

Concerning economic matters, evidence gathered from source documents, in particular company registers and tax records indicate that the main area and source of income for Jews was connected with trade. About 45% of all Cracow Jews were engaged in this form of activity. Far fewer, just 15% earned a living as craftsmen, about 5% worked in industry and the same amount were bankers and dealt in bills of exchange. The remaining inhabitants drew their income from other forms of activity or were totally deprived of any means of survival and resorted to begging or were given aid.¹⁶

¹¹ *Statut zarządzający starozakonnych w Wolnem Mieście Krakowie i Jego Okręgu*, Kraków 1817, § 22.

¹² Kopff 1906, 59, 139.

¹³ *Statut zarządzający starozakonnych...*, §§ 22–23.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, § 23, § 28.

¹⁵ Kopff 1906, 59, 139.

¹⁶ Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie (State Archive, Cracow), *Żydzi (1816–1843)*, WMK V-59, 1815; Bałaban 1936, 625–637; Demel 1951, 35–45.

A comparison of Cracow Jews and Christians in terms of city economic development shows that it was the former group of inhabitants who paid higher taxes¹⁷ and it was these who either owned or leased the majority of shops, stalls and craftsmen's workshops.¹⁸ This was the status quo despite the obstacles which Jews faced in being admitted to the Merchant Guild and the Guild of Craftsmen, and despite the unfavourable conditions under the *Statute Establishing the Israelites in the Free City of Cracow and its Environs*, which prohibited Cracow Jews from freely engaging in trade, craft and industrial activities throughout the city, limiting them only to Kazimierz.¹⁹

At the same time we should not be surprised that trade and craft were the main sources of maintenance for Cracow Jews. This was not only because professions relating to these two forms of activity constituted an age long tradition amongst Cracow Jews. This was also because in this period Cracow was one of the largest transit centres in Central and Eastern Europe, and craft and commerce were lucrative forms of activity.

When considering Cracow Jews under the Republic of Cracow one cannot omit the administrative changes which affected them. As the *Statute Establishing the Israelites in the Free City of Cracow and its Environs* abolished the autonomous Jewish administration unit, the *kehila*, the entire area of the Republic of Cracow, inhabited by the Jewish population, was divided into 2 new administration units, known as *obwód* (district).²⁰ As a result, under the Republic of Cracow, Cracow Jews were the inhabitants of the Cracow *obwód* to which Jews, from outside Cracow, occupying areas to the north-east and south-east of the city-state also belonged.²¹

With the abolition of the Cracow *kehila* the 23 members of the *kehila* Board were no longer representatives of Cracow Jews.²² In 1818 the Board was replaced by a 4-member Committee, which under the Presidency of a Christian, was also composed of a rabbi and 2 other orthodox Jews.²³ The above changes also limited the authority of the Cracow rabbi. This resulted Hirsz Dawid Lewi, who held the office of rabbi in 1816–1832, and his successor Dov Ber Meisels, limiting themselves to religious matters, whilst all other matters of a jurisdictional and administrative nature belonged to the authority of corresponding public offices.²⁴

In analysing the above changes one may conclude that under the Republic of Cracow serious steps were taken to increase the influence of state authority over the Jewish community of Cracow. At the same time it must be stressed that such far-reaching intervention in *kehila* structure was a novel approach and had never previously been practised or introduced in parallel legislation of neighbouring countries.

¹⁷ Gelber 1924, 225; Schiper 1937, 343–345. See also Gąsowski 1988, 22.

¹⁸ Friedmann 1932, 401.

¹⁹ *Statut urządzający starozakonnych...*, § 21.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, § 1, § 11.

²¹ *Ibidem*, § 11.

²² *Ibidem*, § 1.

²³ *Ibidem*, § 9.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, §§ 2–3, §§ 6–7.

The final topic which we would like to consider is education. Under the Republic of Cracow young Jews had free access to all levels of state education, university included. However, they did not demonstrate en masse interest in the opportunities offered by secular education. Throughout the existence of the Republic of Cracow only 287 boys and 1394 girls of Jewish faith graduated from local primary schools.²⁵ In turn, around 200 pupils graduated from secondary level schools²⁶ and about 60 Jews studied at the Jagiellonian University.²⁷

This state of affairs was brought about by a number of factors. The main reason was attachment to traditional, religious education, which was valued higher than secular knowledge. The Cracow Jews were still not mentally prepared for what took place in the latter half of the 19th century, namely replacing their dream to have a son who would become a rabbi with the dream of having a son who would become a doctor or lawyer.

Summing up, we are aware that we have adopted a general approach to just a number of the many aspects of the Cracow Jews. Despite this approach we hope that our observations will give readers a better understanding of the importance of period of the Republic of Cracow in the history of the Cracow Jewry.

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²⁵ Brodowicz 1874, XIV. See also Kalinka 1898, 123.

²⁶ Archiwum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Jagiellonian University Archives), *Spisy uczniów Liceum św. Anny (1818/19–1832/33)*, S I 545/S I 657/S I 658; *Spisy uczniów Liceum św. Anny (1833/34–1848/49)*, S I 546/S I 659; *Spisy uczniów Liceum św. Barbary (1817/18–1833/34)*, S I 565/S I 684; *Dziennik zapisu uczniów Liceum św. Barbary dla urzędu Inspektora Instytutów Naukowych przedsięwzięty 1828/29*, S I 566/S I 685; *Dziennik zapisu uczniów Liceum św. Barbary dla urzędu Inspektora Instytutów Naukowych przedsięwzięty 1829/30*, S I 567/S I 686; *Spisy uczniów Szkoły Technicznej (1834/35–1848/49)*, S I 590/S I 712/S I 713.

²⁷ Archiwum Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego (Jagiellonian University Archives), *Album C. R. Universitatis Cracoviensis (1802/03–1837/38)*, S I 417/S I 505; *Album Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis (1838/39–1849/50)*, S I 418/S I 506; *Dziennik zapisu audytorów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego na rok szkolny 1828/29 dla urzędu Inspektora Instytutów Naukowych sporządzony*, S I 419/S I 507; *Dziennik zapisu audytorów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego na rok szkolny 1829/30 dla urzędu Inspektora Instytutów Naukowych sporządzony*, S I 420/S I 508; *Dziennik zapisu audytorów Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego na rok szkolny 1830/31 dla urzędu Inspektora Instytutów Naukowych sporządzony*, S I 421/S I 509. See also Kulczykowski 1970. 15–75; Bieniarzówna 1988, 33–39.

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